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PACIFIC COAST PENSIONERS ASSOCIATION ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
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MIKE JAGIELSKI OF ILWU LOCAL 8 (Portland) & 23 (Tacoma), PCPA

**INTERVIEWEE:** MIKE JAGIELSKI

**INTERVIEWER:** HARVEY SCHWARTZ

**SUBJECTS:** WORLD WAR II; ILWU LOCAL 8 (PORTLAND); PUERTO RICO CONFLICT; ILWU LOCAL 23 (TACOMA); LOADING CARGO.

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[00:00:00] **HARVEY:** This is Harvey Schwartz. I'm in Long Beach, California. Today is September 17, 2017. This is part of the PCPA Oral History Project, and I'm with Mike Jagielski.

[00:00:22] **MIKE JAGIELSKI:** Hello, Harvey.

[00:00:24] **HARVEY:** Good day. It's nice to meet you. Not that I haven't known you for many years. Can you tell me, Mike, can you spell your name for the machine?

[00:00:36] **MIKE:** J-A-G-I-E-L-S-K-I.

[00:00:41] **HARVEY:** And where were you born and when were you born?

[00:00:45] **MIKE:** I was born on May 26, 1947, in Portland, Oregon.

[00:00:49] **HARVEY:** Okay. Tell me something about your parents and your background—their background.

[00:00:57] **MIKE:** How much detail do you want?

[00:01:00] **HARVEY:** Details, okay.

[00:01:02] **MIKE:** My father was a Longshoreman, a member of Local 8 in Portland, Oregon. He'd been a Merchant Marine during the U.S. World War II period. [pause] There's a long story there that I don't want to get into right now. Maybe later we'll get into it.

[00:01:30] **HARVEY:** How come?

[00:01:30] **MIKE:** Well, if you want to start there, that's fine. My father died when he was 37 years old of cancer, and he'd been diagnosed when he was 27 years old. And I looked for 30 years for evidence that he was exposed to radiation somewhere, and finally, three years ago, my sister gave me 50 letters that my father wrote to my mother while he was sailing in the South Pacific. And the very last letter said, "The captain has the option of going back to the States—the war is over—or we can continue on to Japan." And the next line said, "We're heading towards the setting sun." So I know my father was probably in either Hiroshima or Nagasaki, and he was exposed there, and two years later he was diagnosed with cancer, and 10 years later he was dead.

When my father died, my mom, who came out from Minneapolis after she graduated from high school, came to Portland to work in the shipyards. And in 1943, she was keeping a diary, and I happened to find this diary in a locker a few years later. And the first six weeks of the diary were ripped out, and the next—the first notation said, "Met a man named Ray today. Hope to meet him again." Well, they did, and two years later, they were married.

My mom had a high school education. She had three kids when my father died. She was 33 years old. And we lived on Social Security and veterans' benefits. We weren't poor. We weren't rich, but we had a home, we always had hot meals and clothes to wear. It was a pretty good life.

[00:03:48] **HARVEY:** She had three children?

[00:03:50] **MIKE:** I have a younger brother two years younger, and a younger sister two years younger than that.

[00:03:55] **HARVEY:** Any of them work on the waterfront?

[00:03:57] **MIKE:** No.

[00:04:00] **HARVEY:** Any other waterfront workers in your family background, going back beyond your dad?

[00:04:06] **MIKE:** No, no. My mom's parents settled in Minnesota when they came over from Sweden. And my father's parents came from Poland, both of them, and they ended up in Portland.

[00:04:31] **HARVEY:** When did they arrive there?

[00:04:36] **MIKE:** There are some documents that my cousin has found when my grandfather first came to the United States, and he went through Baltimore. And he had to go back three different times to swear allegiance to the United States, and and forswear any allegiance to the King of Prussia and the Axis and the Bolsheviks and all that crazy stuff that was going on in Europe in the 19-teens. He first came over here in 1909 or 1911. He was a young man, 18, 19 years old.

[00:05:11] **HARVEY:** Was he politically active in the old country?

[00:05:14] **MIKE:** Don't know. And we have no family to tell us any stories. My uncle was the last remaining contact with that generation, and he died 12 years ago when he was 75 years old.

[00:05:31] **HARVEY:** What did your grandfather do for a living?

[00:05:36] **MIKE:** My grandfather—my father's father—was a barber. I see that he was actually in some real estate. I know that he purchased a lot of property in east Portland—lots of property, hundreds of acres of land. Every dime he made, he went into buying property. And he passed away when he was 41, I think. And my grandmother, in order to survive, had to sell the property.

She herself was a powerhouse woman. She was a Rose Festival princess in like 1916. We have a picture of her on a float. My brother found it somewhere, I don't know where. [chuckles] She was an opera singer. She was a member of the Daughters of whatever and this and that. I mean, she's got lots of stuff. She died of cancer, and my father died of cancer.

My mom eventually, at the age of 44, died of a heart attack. And me, knowing both of my grandfathers were dead around the age of 40—and my father died at 37—and I knew when I was about 12 years old that I was going to be dead before I was 40. Twelve years old. So, I was a bit of an irresponsible young man.

[00:07:17] **HARVEY:** In what sense?

[00:07:19] **MIKE:** I went to school to play sports. I didn't study. I did the minimum amount necessary to get by. I had multiple teachers tell me, "Mike, you're wasting your talents." "Well, yeah, probably." [shrugs] What do you do? I knew that I was never going to bring kids into this world and leave them with questions that needed to be answered. That wasn't going to happen. [chuckles] Until one day, I saw a smile across the room.

[00:07:54] **HARVEY:** Uh-huh. Always a mistake.

[00:07:58] **MIKE:** I asked her to go out the next week. And eventually, we got married.

[00:08:04] **HARVEY:** And her name is ...?

[00:08:05] **MIKE:** Her name was [Deborah Carol Bedeny?] , and she had a smile that lit up the room. Still does.

[00:08:14] **HARVEY:** Sounds great.

[00:08:16] **MIKE:** Yeah. [laughing]

[00:08:17] **HARVEY:** I want to ask you one thing. Do you know when your dad went on the waterfront initially? Was it before the war or after the war?

[00:08:24] **MIKE:** In 1937, he joined the Army. Dropped out of high school and joined the Army. He was on a troopship heading to Hawaii on December 5, 1941. On December 10, it turned around and came back to San Francisco. Now we're a wartime Army. He was discharged in ill health in 1943. He was one of two places. I've got some military records and I have a hard time deciphering some of this stuff. It's old mimeograph stuff, whatever. He was either offered an opportunity to go to officers' training or flight school. So, he was somewhere in Tennessee and I don't know what he was doing. He was discharged. He went to work on the waterfront. He joined the Merchant Marine, and when he came back in 1945, 46, I think he quit sailing and went to work on the waterfront, Local 8 in Portland.

[00:09:26] **HARVEY:** Okay.

[00:09:28] **MIKE:** And I have a little bit of information about that, but not much. I know that he was in and out of the hospital multiple times, surgical procedures. My mom said it was like eight major surgeries and seven minor surgeries. So, he was in the hospital a lot. I remember spending a lot of time in the car while my mom went in to visit him at the hospital because they wouldn't let us go in. And eventually, his death was declared war-related, because they discharged him in ill health instead of treating him. The doctor that did treat him went to bat with the Veterans Administration, and eventually we got some good benefits out of the whole thing. Yeah.

[00:10:14] **HARVEY:** What kind of early jobs did you have? Did you graduate from high school?

[00:10:18] **MIKE:** Oh, yeah, I graduated. I graduated with a 3.2 GPA or something.

[00:10:27] **HARVEY:** That's pretty good.

[00:10:28] **MIKE:** I did a lot of different stuff. I worked in warehouses. I went to school on the G.I. Bill. I survived on the G.I. Bill on \$135 a month.

[00:10:40] **HARVEY:** Were you in the military?

[00:10:44] **MIKE:** 1969. June 1969, I got drafted.

[00:10:49] **HARVEY:** Okay.

[00:10:50] **MIKE:** And they trained me to be a medic. And then they sent me to Puerto Rico to fight the Puerto Rican conflict. And then, when we won that one, nine months later they transferred me to Atlanta, Georgia.

[00:11:08] **HARVEY:** You say a conflict in Puerto Rico?

[00:11:13] **MIKE:** Well, we called it a conflict, because the Puerto Ricans—a lot of Puerto Ricans were, at that time, seeking independence from the United States. So one day, there were, I don't know, 5,000 Puerto Ricans standing—marching outside Fort Brooke, where we were stationed. It was a hospital basically. And this was a comedy, really a comedy. They're marching out there and screaming and yelling and singing songs and whatnot. And we tried to close the gates. The gates hadn't been closed in years—big old wooden gates—and then we couldn't get the lock to fit. So they just went and got a chain and wrapped it around there. Nobody ever tried to come in. You know, it was just a joke. It was a joke to us, but it wasn't to them.

And so there were a lot of places that were off limits to military personnel. There were fights. So, it was a conflict. But truly, I was never in any conflicts. I went some places that I shouldn't have gone, and I went there more than once because I didn't have an responsibility in my life. But I always got out of it. I always got out of trouble.

[00:12:29] **HARVEY:** What kind of places were those?

[00:12:32] **MIKE:** Harvey, this is all going to be recorded for history, for crying out loud. [laughter] There's a place called La Perla. It's outside the the seawall. And the seawall was built in the early 1500s, and the dregs of society were down there. The story when I got there was "Don't go down into La Perla, because two guys went down there one day and they never came back, and then two military policemen went down there in their vehicle, and they didn't come back and neither did the car." Well, how about that?

Ironically, I had a teacher—I went to college for quite a while and I had this teacher that I stayed in touch with, you know, we were corresponding. And she sent me a book called La Perla: In the Life. It was an interesting book. It was a sociological study about the people that lived in La Perla. [sighs] So, I went down there.

[00:13:34] **HARVEY:** I see. What did you see?

[00:13:37] **MIKE:** I saw incredible poverty. You know, these were really shacks. They'd just hammered some board together and put tin around them or whatever. I mean, if the camera wasn't on, I'd tell you a really interesting story, but I'm not going to tell that story. But I saw some stuff that just blew me away. And I just walked back out. Two guys escorted me back out. There were five Puerto Ricans coming down the hill, and I hadn't had a haircut in five months, and I'd been on Condato Beach four or five times a week, and my hair was long and it was platinum blond. And I walked underneath a streetlight and these guys coming down the hill just stopped when they saw me. And the two guys with me said, "Just walk right between them like you own the place." And so we did. They parted, and we walked through, and we were about 15 feet from the main street when they decided they were going to come up and kick my ass. They turned around to run at me and a cop is across the street, and I'm "Amigo! Amigo!" And he goes "Ah, yes"—whatever—and they stopped, and they went back down and I escaped, once again, an ass-kicking.

[00:14:55] **HARVEY:** Now, were you in the Army at the time?

[00:14:57] **MIKE:** I was.

[00:14:58] **HARVEY:** With long hair?

[00:15:00] **MIKE:** Well, long hair—yeah, this was like a MASH unit. I didn't stand one inspection until like two weeks before we were going to come back to the States. There was one sergeant, we called him Sergeant God because he was a by-the-rules-book, and somebody took a shot at him when he was walking down that same street. Pshew! Took a shot at him. Ricocheted off the wall. And that was one message that somebody sent to him. It wasn't me. And then we were playing on a softball team together and he was the pitcher. And after the games would be over, we'd share a couple of beers, and he found out we were just people, and we were in a military base in Puerto Rico. What's the point? Why do you have to be by the book? We're in Puerto Rico, for crying out loud. There were 65 enlisted men, there were like 12 doctors that were officers. Why do you need this military discipline? We're not going to fight the war. So, that was it. [shrugs]

[00:16:11] **HARVEY:** Do you have medic training at Fort Sam Houston?

[00:16:13] **MIKE:** I did.

[00:16:17] **HARVEY:** You know, you mentioned something about college. We kind of missed a beat there. What was your experience with college? Was this before the military or after?

[00:16:28] **MIKE:** Oh, before and after.

[00:16:30] **HARVEY:** Before and after?

[00:16:30] **MIKE:** Yeah.

[00:16:33] **HARVEY:** But you said—

[00:16:33] **MIKE:** I went for two years. I went to escape the draft and to play basketball. All right? And along the way, I was ... well, I wasn't really passing many classes, but I was taking a lot of classes. And the G. I. Bill doesn't say you have to pass a class, they just say you have to take them. So, I was making \$135 a month, which was enough for me to do what I had to do to survive until the next month. And I learned a lot of stuff. I liked some classes so much I took them more than once. So, I accumulated a lot of hours, but I was not on any path to any degree at all. So, I dropped out of school for a while for a number of reasons.

[00:17:25] **HARVEY:** What do you mean by a number of reasons?

[00:17:29] **MIKE:** Well, I had to go to the drunk tank one time. I had to plead guilty to doing something I didn't do to escape persecution for something that I did do. My roommate and another friend broke into a police car in north Portland.

[00:17:44] **HARVEY:** It sounds very intelligent.

[00:17:47] **MIKE:** It wasn't very smart. And they stole some helmets that these guys were forced to wear. They were like baseball bump caps. Right? Big logo on the front, Portland Police Department. And a few days later, my roommate wore one of these down to Portland Community College, which was about three blocks away from where I was living—where we were living. And we were sitting at a big table, and everybody's trying this hat on, and they were laughing about it. And the president of the student body is over there watching this. And he didn't know anybody else, but he knew me because I was on the basketball team. So, a week later, knock, knock, knock on the door, and the police are coming to get me at 4:00 in the morning.

And these guys weren't very happy. And when they walked me out to the car, one guy says, as he's tapping his sidearm, "This is a felony arrest, and if you make any attempt to escape, I'll do everything in my power to stop you." Okay. So, I got in the car, and his partner got in the backseat with me and the other cop got in the front seat to drive, and he leaned over the seat and looked at me and says, "Do you know who I am?" I says, "Yeah, you're Officer Taylor." He says, "I'm the cop whose helmet you stole, and I'll never forget you the rest of my life." And I looked at him and I said, "I did not steal your helmet." We looked at each other for like 30 seconds, eyeball to eyeball. And he just turned around and drove away.

So, my roommate and I went to court three times before these police officers would agree to reduce the charges to petty larceny instead of receiving and concealing stolen property. So Mark and I were ordered to move out of that apartment and spend the weekend in the drunk tank. So, that weekend in the drunk tank was a really small-worldish affair anyway. From that, though, I ended up moving into the guy who actually stole the helmets—he was about my size, had long blond hair like me—and I didn't rat him out. So we're sleeping on his living room couch, and we got a phone call. "Get your little butts down to the hall. They're giving out white cards." First time in 13 years Portland has taken in casuals.

[00:20:25] **HARVEY:** How come you'd applied to be a casual?

[00:20:29] **MIKE:** Because David's mom said, "David, you get your ass down to that Longshore hall and get a white card." I had no place else to live. "Dave, c'mon, we've got to go." So down to the hall we go. I got the

45th card they gave out that day. First time in 13 years; they just put 150 new B men and now they had no casuals.

[00:20:55] **HARVEY:** What year is this again?

[00:20:57] **MIKE:** May 25, 1967, the day before my 20th birthday. So the guy that looks at my paperwork he [gruffly] says, “You Ray’s kid?”—in a voice you’d never forget, and I had heard it before. And I said, “Yes, he was my dad.” “Well, it’s too bad, kid. We could have got you hardship.” “What’s that?” “Doesn’t matter now. How’s your mom doing?” “Well, she just got remarried about three months ago.” “No, it’s too bad, kid. Could have got you hardship.” [shrugs]

My mom didn’t want me to work on the waterfront. She wanted me to be a professional. I knew when I was about 11 years old that I wanted to work on the waterfront. I remember my dad coming home from work—he worked at the grain elevator for the most part when he was healthy—he’d come in the house, he’d go down the basement stairs, he’d take his boots off and grain would bounce down the stairs. And he was dusty and tired, but what the heck.

They had a baseball team. I love baseball. I played baseball until I was 50 years old. And he had this coat that had 50s-style tackle, twill, knitted sleeves and hair on his shoulders so he could actually throw the ball. But the key to this, the jacket was black and the whole back was a baseball—stitches—and it was the ILWU logo. “An injury to one is an injury to all. Portland, Oregon Local 8.” And the United States, the East and West Coasts, superimposed on the baseball. I want to have one of these one day. I’ve been looking for 50, 60 years now, too, and I still haven’t found it.

So I’d known for a long time that I wanted to work on the waterfront. So now, I’m a casual on the waterfront, and there’s 150 new B men that are hungry, so there wasn’t very much work for the first couple of years. And you have to make a living, so I did other things.

[00:23:20] **HARVEY:** What else did you do?

[00:23:23] **MIKE:** You know, I gave blood sometimes—because I was actually still going to school, too. And then I got drafted. I got drafted two years later, and I spent two years in there. I came back out. Five days before I was going to get out of the Army—I’m getting a 90-day early out—we go to the Third Army basketball championships. And after it’s all over, there’s a guy with a European accent who says, “We’re going to take 50 Army guys to update New York, and they’re going to learn how to play this game called team handball. And from that group of 50, we’re going to knock it down to 25, and then those guys are going to go to Europe and learn how to play this game, and compete in the 1972 Olympics.”

So he showed us this film of the 1968 world championship game between Bulgaria and Romania— a couple of Eastern European nations anyway—and it was an incredible game. So then they had us— the field is all set up outside for us to go out. It’s an inside game, played like on a basketball court, about that same size. You shoot into a net that’s six feet by 10 feet with a goalie and whatever. So, we’d never seen this game before, but we went out and did it. After it was all over—I think we played two or three games—the same fellow came up and tapped me on the shoulder and asked me if I’d be interested in going to upstate New York. I said, “I’ve been looking forward to going home for 21 months. I’m going home.” Really stupid. I didn’t even ask any questions. I could have said, “Hey, I’ve got 90 days to go. I’m getting an early out. What happens if I don’t make it? What happens if I make it and then I get cut?” I have no idea, but I didn’t ask any questions. I was going home. So, I went home, and I went back to school and took some of the same classes I’d taken before at a different campus.

[00:25:28] **HARVEY:** What kind of classes?

[00:25:30] **MIKE:** Oh, god. Anthropology, psychology, history. It didn't matter. I wasn't going to get a degree, I was just going to school. And the G.I. Bill was paying for it again.

Then I got a job in a warehouse, and then I got a job painting houses. I had a partner and we started doing houses, and then we started doing apartment complexes, and then we started doing big buildings in downtown Portland, because there wasn't much work on the waterfront, especially after Mount St. Helens blew up.

[00:26:03] **HARVEY:** Yeah.

[00:26:05] **MIKE:** I got B registration in April of 1980, and a month later, Mount St. Helens blew up. So I became a casual with benefits. And over the next six years, I only got one qualifying year, and that was 1985 when I went down to Coos Bay, Oregon to work. And while I was there, I saw some paperwork. It said there's an opportunity for B men in low-work opportunity ports to transfer to either Port Hueneme, Coos Bay, or Tacoma. So, when I went back to Portland after I got my 800 hours, I told some other people about it. And they went in and talked to the earnings clerk, and the earning clerk said, "Naw, that's not happening." Oh? Then they came back and told me, and so I went in and said, "I saw the paperwork." "Well, we had a list. We sent it in to the PMA [Pacific Maritime Association]." "Neil, you didn't post any list, but you'd better post a list now, and put my name at the top of this thing, because I want out of here."

And I walked out and slammed the door. I was so angry. Out and out lying to us. And I'm not planning on going anywhere. My wife is the youngest of nine kids. We still get together with her parents on Sunday afternoons for homemade cinnamon rolls and coffee, and everybody yaks and giggles. My wife's not going to want to go anywhere. We've got one little girl and another bun in the oven. But on my way home, I was thinking about it, the opportunity. I'd just spent time in Coos Bay, and for the first time in five years, worked six days in one week. I was longshoring now, I wasn't painting houses or working in a warehouse somewhere, I was doing what I want to do. So, by the time I got home, I was convinced I wanted to go to Tacoma. "[Debby?] what do you think," I said. "We have an opportunity." "Whatever you think is best for the family, Mike."

And this is in November, and we're thinking, well, this isn't going to happen until, god, you know, a year from now. Well, we had a meeting in Tacoma in February. Twenty-four of us came up from the river—one guy from Astoria, I think six from Vancouver and the rest of us from Portland. And so we're all nervous as can be. We're around the old executive board at the old hall, the executive board room. And there's a bunch of guys around the table in the middle, LRC guys and officers. And there's one old guy sitting in a chair at the end of the table, and he's got a baseball hat on and a baseball coat, and he's sitting like this [arms crossed closely over his chest, head down]—not looking up, not paying any attention to what's going on.

And then there's rap on the table. Silence. And he says, "We don't want you here." And he looks at everybody, all the way around the room. He says, "It's not because of who you are, it's what you represent. You're getting shoved down our throats, and we don't like it. Don't think you guys can come up here and draw PGP, because you're going to go to work." And we all started to clap, because we came up there to work. We'd been living on PGP—Pay Guarantee Plan. Well, Pay Guarantee Plan in the early 80s, when we were in recession and interest rates were at 24 percent, they were cutting. There were so many people drawing PGP that the B men were supposed to get 28 hours, we were living on 14 hours a week.

So, the first week I was there, I worked 70 hours. I knew this was where I was going to stay. I worked until the first of May. I went back home. I got our house ready to rent. Found a renter a week before we were supposed to move. I almost gave it back to the state. I was on a G. I. loan at four percent interest rate. Fortunately, a neighbor had a friend that needed a place for a while. We kept that house for another 12 years, I think, but we



moved to Tacoma. And actually, when I was up here, I was looking for a house in Gig Harbor. I looked for three months and I finally found this little cottage. With a view of Mount Rainier. Great little neighborhood. Yeah. [Debby?] , when she showed up, we drove up in a caravan, and she saw that house and she just burst into tears, because on the outside, it was a mess. It was only about 800, 900 square feet and the outside was peeling. [imitates crying] “I gave up my beautiful house for this?” [chuckles]

We laugh about it now, because to Tacoma was the best thing possible for all of us. For me, it provided me an opportunity to make a living doing what I love to do. For her, it was an opportunity for her to get out of the shadow of her eight older siblings, and become something special. So it was good for the whole family.

[00:32:10] **HARVEY:** I want to roll you back to the beginning for just a little bit in terms of the work itself. What was the first day that you were on the waterfront? This was probably out of Portland?

[00:32:20] **MIKE:** Yeah, it was probably May 27, 1967.

[00:32:24] **HARVEY:** Right. Can you recall what you did that day, what the experience was like?

[00:32:32] **MIKE:** Well, as a matter of fact, I do, because I tell that story quite often. That’s when I knew I was going to like the waterfront. I would have worked on the 26th, but it was my birthday, so the 27th, I went to work. We were loading cargo for Vietnam, and the first cargo board that came in had cases of Carling Black Label beer in Heidelberg keg bottles. They were really popular in the 60s and 70s; the first time I’d seen Carling Black Label in keg bottles. And the second one that came in had a gunny sack full of ice. And you can imagine what happened. They filled it up, and by the end of the day, one of these guys was so drunk that we had to take him out of the hold in a garbage tarp. And I’m thinking, I think I’m going to like this job. This is going to be great.

[00:33:38] **HARVEY:** Was there any difficulty in learned how to do the job in the beginning? Did you get instruction, did you get help?

[00:33:45] **MIKE:** On-the-job training. Mostly it was throwing sacks. The guy that stole the helmets, his name was [David Young?] . He weighed about 145 pounds. The first time we worked in the hold together, we were handling 140-pound sacks of coffee. Building a board. Building a board. We had no idea what we were doing. We had no equipment, had no gloves, had the wrong clothing on. [shrugs] I didn’t have enough money to go out and buy anything, so—and the old guys, the experienced guys, they just watched us for like two boards. We’d drop these things on the deck and they would have to just mess around with them, and finally get them on the board. And our boards , they were probably thinking they were dangerous taking these boards out of the hatch because we really didn’t know how to stow anything. They finally took pity on us and [put] a seasoned guy working with us, and they showed us, you know, one guy grab the ears and one guy throw it and just guide it. It’s so simple once you understand what’s going on. So, yeah, that was the first time we worked together in the hold.

Grass seeds. God. Whoo. Hides. You don’t have to be smart to handle hides. You have to be smart not to go to [haul?] that day.

[00:35:23] **HARVEY:** Tell me about working hides. Is that a clean job, a dirty job?

[00:35:32] **MIKE:** These were cowhides that weighed anywhere from 40 to 75 or 80 pounds, and they were wrapped, tied into a bundle with twine, and they were a bloody mess. And the drivers would bring these things in and stack them against a warehouse, with the sun baking down on them on July and August days. And then it was our job to load these into a bucket. And the twine wasn’t really tied tight, and they were so bloody and

greasy, they would just slop all over the place. And it was a real pain. Oh. We would go across the street for lunch and they would kick us out. They would let us order food, and then they would have us go outside because we just reeked. It wasn't much fun. But it paid. And nobody else wanted the job, and when you're a casual, you take what you can get. So, we did it.

[00:36:45] **HARVEY:** Did you have any equipment for it, like gloves or anything like that?

[00:36:47] **MIKE:** They provided protective equipment. You still stunk.

[00:36:52] **HARVEY:** What is protective equipment?

[00:36:53] **MIKE:** Rubber galoshes, an apron and some gloves that came up to about here [halfway up his forearm] . But once those gloves got wet with blood, you couldn't pick anything up. So, guess what you had to do? [chuckles] No gloves. Ugh.

[00:37:13] **HARVEY:** Did they use hooks on them at all?

[00:37:15] **MIKE:** Pardon?

[00:37:16] **HARVEY:** Could you use hooks on them? I've seen some specialized hooks for hides.

[00:37:20] **MIKE:** We didn't have any hooks, and none were provided.

[00:37:25] **HARVEY:** Okay.

[00:37:27] **MIKE:** No.

[00:37:31] **HARVEY:** What other products did you work that were—for example, that you enjoyed? Try that first.

[00:37:38] **MIKE:** Driving a forklift. Loading, working in the warehouses, moving cargo boards of cargo or whatever. Servicing the hook. That was fun. I liked moving lumber, loading lumber. That was fun. We did a lot of that in Tacoma.

[00:38:02] **HARVEY:** Why was it fun?

[00:38:04] **MIKE:** You know, when you can picture how a puzzle is supposed to go together, and you see, okay, this is 20-foot, and you just, you have to have certain skills, certain techniques, a certain touch, good depth perception. Well, that was right up my alley, so I could make things happen. Little tricks that you learn along the way about coming in a little bit of an angle so you can get around a corner. Just little stuff that you learn along the way. And you're part of a team. You know, it's not just me working, there's like six people, bringing paper rolls to the barge, or stacking lumber in the warehouse for the next whatever, you know. It was just fun.

[00:38:49] **HARVEY:** What about unpleasant cargo? What was your worst cargo, besides hides?

[00:38:54] **MIKE:** The only job I ever quit when I was a casual was a screw barge with some ammonia sulfite or something in it. Right? So it was a big, old barge and nobody told me how you were supposed to do anything. I didn't know anything. So they said, "Just make sure that the auger doesn't get plugged." Okay, how do I know when it's plugged? So I keep poking my head, looking down this hatch. God, after a while, my nose was getting sore, and after a while, my eyes were like, jeez. So at noon, I finally called the hall and said, "Man,

my nose is running, I'm bleeding, my eyes are aching. I quit. I can't do this." The guy that showed me what to do, I never saw him after that. So I just went home. That was terrible.

[00:39:48] **HARVEY:** Wow. Any other stories about cargo?

[00:39:55] **MIKE:** I could tell you about the time that we loaded a flat rack on a container ship, the [Mauna Lani?], and there was a boat on it, maybe a 30-, 35-foot boat. It was lashed to a flat rack that had four-foot posts on either corner. And the boat was so high, they had to use cables for over-height gear. And my partner [Louis Snetling?] and I were watching this thing happen. We watched them hook it up on the dock, and and we're looking in the hatch and there's no access, there's no ladders. I asked Frank Hedlund, who was the boss, "How are we going to get down there, Frank?" And he says, "We're going to ride it like a cowboy." Oh, okay.

So, Louis and I are watching this load come up off the truck it was on, and Louis said, "Something's not right." "You're right, it just doesn't look right." But I didn't know what it was. So the crane operator brought this thing over and he settled it into the center cell, and there's nothing else in it, and nothing else is going in this hatch. And it was my first job after being off for three weeks. I had a bruised thigh, I think that's what it was. I don't know, I've had a lot of injuries in my time on the waterfront. And so the catwalk between the two hatches is really narrow, and the decks are really high, so it was about a four-foot jump down. So John [last name?] and Louis jump down. I went over to the end of the hatch and took a couple steps down and walked back. And now they're already on there, and I stepped on on also onto the flat rack, and I thought, well, somebody's going to have to hook the other end. So I stepped off and I started walking around the hatch to get on the other end. The load started into the cell. My first instinct was to stop him, and I looked down and I said, "Oh, god, there's nothing else down there. They can just step off the flat and go unhook the other end themselves." About the time I thought that, one of the hooks broke loose holding this corner post in place, and Louis fell off. And I looked at John, and he's already got ahold of the other strap. And then the weight finally went [psheew!], and this one broke, and it shot John down to the deck. And the flat fell, and the bracing broke and the boat crashed down.

And I can't tell for sure if it actually hit him, but when I looked down there, I saw three bloody spots, and mine was one of them, but I was looking at it. So they both got taken off the boat in body bags...and I called my wife about 15 minutes later. A little odd to be calling her at 2:00 in the afternoon, and she said, "What happened?" "I just saw two guys get killed. And I should have been one of them."

I played basketball a couple nights later. I played three nights a week with the same group of guys, and my painting partner was one of them. He saw me walk in the door, and he was 100 feet away, and he sprinted full speed. Gave me a big hug. Yeah, that was my worst day on the waterfront.

[00:44:24] **HARVEY:** Yeah.

[00:44:27] **MIKE:** So, that's my bad cargo.

[00:44:31] **HARVEY:** Boy, that's a tough one. Let's kind of roll back where we were in the 1980s. You're in Local 23.

[00:44:49] **MIKE:** "Freshwater longshoreman in a saltwater port."

[00:44:53] **HARVEY:** Yeah.

[00:44:57] **MIKE:** I didn't make that up, they did.

[00:44:58] **HARVEY:** They did, right. Now, who is the fellow who looked to you and looked around the room and said, “We don’t want you”?

[00:45:04] **MIKE:** George Ginnis.

[00:45:05] **HARVEY:** That’s George Ginnis.

[00:45:06] **MIKE:** The infamous George Ginnis.

[00:45:08] **HARVEY:** Okay. What happened with George over time? How did you get along with George Ginnis?

[00:45:14] **MIKE:** [Laughing] I was a B man. “Shut up and do your job.” I had one other conversation with George.

[00:45:20] **HARVEY:** Yeah?

[00:45:21] **MIKE:** And it wasn’t really a conversation. I happened to be listening through a dispatch window in the middle of the day. He was having a conversation with three other people. And I’ve only been there like a year, and so there’s 450 new people to learn. I don’t know who a lot of these people are. And he was having a conversation, and he said something about Harry. Well, you know, I didn’t know Harry, but I’ve read multiple books. And I mentioned something that contradicted what George had just said, and he said—paraphrasing—“That man’s a fucking liar, so shut the fuck up, B man!” Or, words to that effect. Okay.

I didn’t leave. I continued to listen to the conversation, but that was the only other time I had a—well, it’s the only conversation I ever had with him.

[00:46:26] **HARVEY:** The reference was to Harry Bridges, I assume?

[00:46:28] **MIKE:** Yes. Yeah. So, two things. There were 24 of us that went up there to Tacoma. They were not happy that we came, most of them, being the established class As and probably the class Bs. There were 100 class Bs. And every one of us that showed up there was one less cousin, brother, uncle, sister that would not be getting in Local 23. So, there was some resentment that we were there.

Also, Norm Parks, who passed away recently, told us, three of us—he was a bus driver on a car ship—he said, “If I was your age, I’d be going to Tacoma.” He told me many years later, at the convention in Seattle, he said, “I called George Ginnis and I said, ‘We’re sending some of our best people up there.’ George said, ‘We always get the dregs. We never get the best.’” What Norm didn’t tell me until I saw him—the last time I saw him was three years ago—he said, “I forgot to tell you the second call I had with George. George said, ‘I have to apologize to you, Norm. That’s a great group of guys you sent up here.’”

So, it’s true. Out of the group that came up, I think there’s five of them that became foremen. There are six of us or so that became crane operators. And those 24 spots originally, there’s probably 35 or 38 names that filled those 24 spots. Some guys went back to Portland and their spots were filled with other Portland people. There’s supervisors. We had a guy elected as a vice president who served time as the president. A supernova, I call him, and that was me. We’ll tell that story a little later. Two guys that were on business agents. Three guys that were on the LRC. We had guys that got involved and made a difference.

[00:49:02] **HARVEY:** Okay.

[00:49:03] **MIKE:** And one more thing.

[00:49:08] **HARVEY:** Go ahead.

[00:49:09] **MIKE:** A lot of the B men—the new B men, who were part of our group—a lot of them said, “We’re so glad you guys are here. You don’t take any shit from these guys. You’re experienced.” The third or fourth day I was on the job, there was a dispute. Somebody—a walking boss, a foreman—said, “Go do this.” And somebody said, “I’m not doing that. It’s unsafe.” “Go do that!” “No, it says right here in the safety book I don’t have to do that.” And the guy said, “You’ve got a safety book?” “Yeah.” “When did you get it?” “They gave it to me the day I got B registered.” “I’ve never seen one.” So, in Tacoma, unless you specifically went up and asked George for a safety book, or a contract, you’d never see it. And we’d all brought them with us. So those B men were happy to see us there.

After George died and [Bob Brown?] became the business agent, there was a beef on the job. Dave [Riah?] on the dispatch slip was the number seven guy on this dispatch slip. And it was a gang at a Maersk vessel, where the first four guys—everybody goes on and delashes. You start at 5:00 and you go on and delash. And the first four guys are first up, and the last three have to come back and be second up. Dave [Riah?] got the job at 5:10 at the 5:10 dispatch, showed up at like 20 minutes to 6:00, went up on board the ship and worked for about 15 minutes. And then he told [Cary Parker?], who was the number four on the slip, first up, he said, “[Cary,] you’re going home. I’m first up.” [Cary Parker] says, “No, you’re not.” Dave [Riah], A man, says, “Yes, you are.” “Dave, I already asked the foreman about it. You have to come back, you’re second up.” “Well, we’ll see about that.”

And so [Cary] didn’t come back after lunch and neither did Dave.